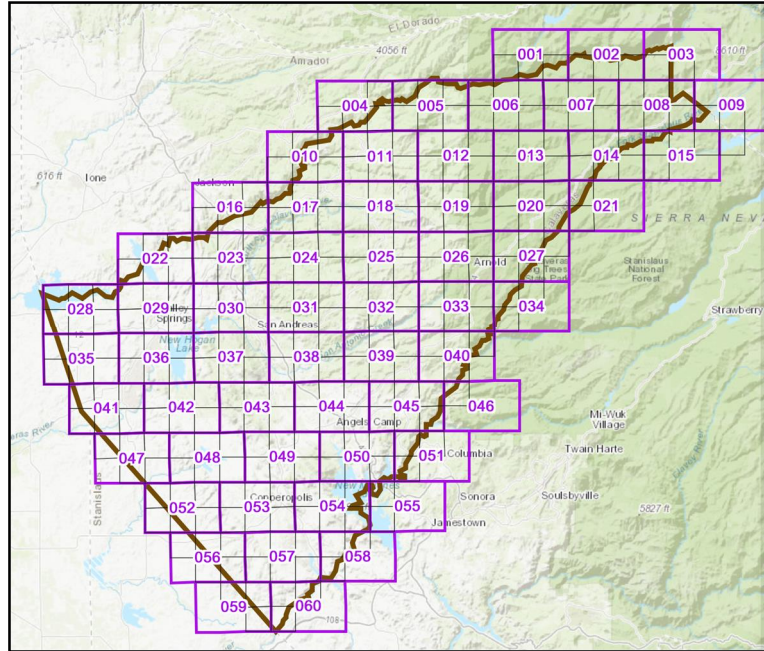


Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury

Disaster Preparedness “What is Your Number?”

October 7, 2020



SUMMARY

Inspired by the 2018-2019 Marin County Grand Jury report, entitled "Wildfire Preparedness – A New Approach" and the fact that Calaveras County is within a high-risk, fire-prone region subject to Public Safety Power Shutoffs, the Calaveras County Grand Jury chose to review the current emergency preparedness plans and potential disaster readiness of lead agencies within the County.

While the Calaveras County Office of Emergency Services maintains a current Emergency Operations Plan and is generally well prepared to coordinate agency efforts to respond to an emergency, individual preparedness by members of the public is crucial to ensure the best outcome for all in the event of a disaster.

GLOSSARY

BOS	Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
CCGJ	Calaveras County Grand Jury
CCPW	Calaveras County Public Works
CCSO	Calaveras County Sheriff's Office
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
GIS	Calaveras County Geographic Information Systems
OES	Calaveras County Office of Emergency Services
PEA	Public Evacuation Application (website)
VOAD	Central Sierra Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

METHODOLOGY

Calaveras County Grand Jury (CCGJ) conducted interviews, researched historical data, reviewed Marin and Napa Grand Jury Final Reports, and visited the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for the Calaveras County Office of Emergency Services (OES).

The CCGJ interviewed the following:

- OES personnel
- Calaveras County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) officers
- Calaveras Emergency Response Teams (CERT) official/volunteers
- American Red Cross representatives
- Calaveras County Public Works (CCPW) personnel
- Central Sierra Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) official

The CCGJ reviewed the following:

- CCPW report titled "2019 Capital Improvement Program Update"
- County-wide mapping and grid system
- My Calaveras County mobile telephone application
- Presentations made to the BOS regarding disaster recovery
- Calaveras County Emergency Operations Plan
- Facebook pages for various County departments
- Relevant news articles

BACKGROUND

In 2015, Calaveras County experienced the Butte Fire, one of the Top 20 Most Destructive Wildfires in California. Two people died, 877 structures were destroyed, 44 damaged, and 70,868 acres burned. The fire involved the support and cooperation of at least 14 agencies including CAL FIRE, local County Sheriff's Offices (Amador and Calaveras), California Office of Emergency Services, Pacific Gas & Electric Company, Caltrans, Bureau of Land Management, and California State Parks. In the years since the fire, Calaveras residents and government have had the opportunity to plan for future wildfires and how responses might be improved.

While fire is the disaster that usually comes to mind in this region, the County must prepare for major disasters in general. It is the responsibility of the OES to prepare and educate the public about what to do during an emergency event. The CCGJ explored the existing process for emergency response and how it is used in real time.

A local emergency may be declared by the Director of OES when a rapidly changing situation exceeds the resources of local jurisdictions and requires the action and coordination of many agencies to restore public safety. Once an emergency is declared, OES opens the Emergency Operations Center to establish a unified authority over the situation. This is a centralized location where representatives from all relevant agencies meet to plan a response. The guiding document for this response is the Emergency Operations Plan, a comprehensive, department specific set of guiding actions that detail the responsibilities of all involved parties. OES also works closely with the California Office of Emergency Services.

Considerations for the next emergency involve: the factors contributing to the likelihood of a disaster, the ability of County agencies to communicate with the public, the integrity of County infrastructure, and the effectiveness and efficiency with which various agencies can respond collaboratively. Additionally, there are several steps members of the public must take to ensure they are informed and prepared.

DISCUSSION

As a result of the Butte Fire, local agencies, responders, and volunteers obtained first-hand knowledge of the challenges involved in managing a major event. Additionally, subsequent planned power outages intended to mitigate weather-related fire hazards due to damaged energy transmission equipment resulted in days- or weeks-long power outages for residents in the County. Using the Calaveras Alert notification system, OES provided information to the public regarding planned outage locations and anticipated durations. Temporary community power stations were identified to assist the public in powering electronic devices.

In the event of an emergency, Calaveras County has a designated location for an EOC within the CCSO administrative building. In the event there is prolonged loss of electricity, the EOC is capable of operating independent of the power grid without the need for generator refueling for up to one week. The EOC is where all of the agencies and departments come together to develop a plan of action. Depending upon the situation, the EOC is managed by a different lead agency. For example, the location of a fire might determine which fire protection service would take the lead.

At the time of this writing, Calaveras County is experiencing a public health emergency (COVID-19 pandemic) and the OES is coordinating the local response. This ongoing global pandemic has shut down most non-essential businesses and services in California. Residents are advised to shelter in their homes and limit exposure to infection by limiting interaction with other people and maintaining a social distance of at least 6 feet with all people who are not members of their household. Public safety guidance is mandated at the state level, with counties and cities keeping residents informed about State-level orders as well as local services and information.

In response to growing public health concerns about the severity of the disease outbreak, the Office of Emergency Services activated an EOC on March 12, 2020. Information from the OES has been shared on various media outlets including the OES website, Facebook, and local news publications.

The Calaveras County Emergency Operation Plan Base Plan was adopted by the BOS in September 2019. This plan addresses the planned response to extraordinary emergencies associated with natural or human caused disasters, technological incidents, and National Special Security Emergencies (NSSE) in or affecting the County of Calaveras. It serves as a comprehensive guide for departments and agencies working within the County. The Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the United States Department of Homeland Security recommend that County Emergency Operation Plans be updated every three years, or sooner if an incident highlights a gap in the current plan.

Several elements that relate to a large-scale evacuation are of particular relevance in Calaveras County. These include limited evacuation routes, difficult terrain, and high fuel loads surrounding roadways and populated areas. These challenges must be considered as residents craft their own emergency plans. The OES website is a comprehensive resource for individuals to develop local disaster preparedness at the household level.

OES is currently operating without a formal office-level policy and procedure manual although one is in the process of being developed. A manual is key to maintaining continuity when personnel changes occur within the department.

In Calaveras County, there are three main ways members of the public can ensure they are as well informed and prepared for an emergency as possible:

1. PROPERTY ADDRESSES

One of the biggest challenges for emergency responders is identifying the location where an incident is occurring. Although California Fire Code §505.1 states that addresses be posted at the road as well as on the building, many properties in Calaveras are not identified in these ways, limiting the ability of first responders to provide rapid assistance. While violating State Fire Code is illegal, enforcement is impractical. Ultimately, it is up to property owners to ensure an address is clearly and accurately posted for their own safety.

2. CALAVERAS ALERT

Individuals may opt-in to Calaveras Alert, an emergency notification program. Alerts are sent by telephone, cell phone, text message, email, and social media when there is a threat to the health or

safety of Calaveras County residents. This program is limited to those who opt-in by registering their contact information. Using figures provided by the U. S. Census Bureau and Calaveras County OES, the CCGJ determined that roughly 35% of the population is currently registered with this program. County residents may sign up at <http://oes.calaverasgov.us/notifications>.

It is the responsibility of the public to ensure the contact information on file is up-to-date and accurate. However, there is no regular alert testing to guarantee the accuracy of the contact information on file. Scheduled tests would help the public maintain awareness and connectivity with the program. Members of the public who anticipate a message can follow up with registration if an alert is not received.

3. PUBLIC EVACUATION APPLICATION

OES, in collaboration with CAL FIRE and the CCSO, created the Public Evacuation Application (PEA) which is designed to alert the public in real time when emergencies occur, where they occur, and what evacuation-based action is recommended to the affected public. The County is divided into 60 grid pages, then further divided into smaller two-mile by two-mile evacuation zones. Calaveras Alert is linked to the grid system and notifies registered contacts located within the affected zone(s). Every property in the County exists within a single zone. The application can be found at <https://oes.calaverasgov.us>. OES encourages everyone to know their zone number, as well as the safest evacuation routes out of their area in the event of an emergency.

The California County Information Services Directors Association awarded Calaveras County Geographic Information System (GIS) the 2019 Innovation Award for the development of PEA. Other counties have since adopted and incorporated PEA into their county emergency strategies.

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND RESPONDENTS

Pursuant to Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses within 60 days from elected county official(s), and within 90 days from governing bodies. In order to be included and published in the next Grand Jury report, invited responses must be received within 90 days.

F1. When buildings and properties are not marked with an address at the road, it can be challenging for emergency services to locate an incident.

R1. The CCGJ recommends that beginning June 2021, the BOS make annual proclamations at their first meeting in June declaring Address Identification Month and urge County residents to ensure their properties are identified in adherence to California Fire Code §505.1.

Required Responses

- Calaveras County Board of Supervisors

F2. The ability of OES to send emergency notifications to the public is limited by an opt-in system requiring that members of the public request to receive information.

- R2.** The CCGJ recommends that the OES increase public outreach and education about the importance of signing up for notification programs and ensure that citizen contact information is current.

Invited Responses

- Director of Office of Emergency Services

- F3.** Without a system to test the viability/suitability of contact numbers enrolled with Calaveras Alert, members of the public may not feel entirely confident they are enrolled, or that their best contact methods will be used.

- R3.** The CCGJ recommends that beginning September 1, 2020, the OES send out test messages on a monthly basis to ensure members of the public are confident their best contact information is registered with the system.

Invited Responses

- Director of Office of Emergency Services

- F4.** While an extensive interdepartmental Emergency Operations Plan does exist, the OES does not operate with an office-level Policy and Procedure Manual to guide employee conduct and maintain consistent practices in the event of personnel change.

- R4.** The CCGJ recommends the OES complete a Policy and Procedure Manual by December 31, 2020.

Invited Responses

- Director of Office of Emergency Services

COMMENDATIONS

- C1.** The CCGJ commends Calaveras County GIS for developing an innovative and award-winning emergency evacuation application that has served as a model to other counties and jurisdictions.

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

REFERENCE SOURCES

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